

Questions and Answers About Seasonal Flu



What is seasonal flu?

Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory disease caused by an influenza virus.

What is flu season?

Flu season is the period of time when flu is circulating among the population. In the United States, flu season is from November through April, and sometimes lasts into May. The Virginia Department of Health recommends receiving your vaccination from October through April.

How does flu spread?

The flu spreads mostly through coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread by touching something with the virus on it then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

What are the symptoms of seasonal flu?

Seasonal flu is marked by upper respiratory symptoms such as coughing and sneezing, fatigue, muscle aches, fever and headaches. Seasonal flu has also been known to cause vomiting or nausea in children.

Is seasonal flu serious?

It can be. Approximately 200,000 Americans are hospitalized with seasonal flu every year and nearly 36,000 die of complications caused by seasonal flu.

How can you prevent seasonal flu?

The single best way to prevent catching and spreading seasonal flu is to get vaccinated. It's also important to practice good health hygiene, such as covering your mouth with your arm when you cough or sneeze, washing your hands often, and staying home if you are not feeling well.

Who should get vaccinated?

Everyone can benefit from getting annual vaccinations for seasonal flu. It is most important for individuals to get vaccinated if they are:

- ✓ Pregnant
- ✓ Ages 6 months to 5 years
- ✓ Over 65
- ✓ Living with certain chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, asthma and diabetes
- ✓ Living with a weakened immune system as a result of HIV or other serious diseases
- ✓ Living in a nursing home or other long-term care facility
- ✓ Living with a nerve or muscle disorder such as severe cerebral palsy or seizure disorder
- ✓ Living or working with any of the groups mentioned above

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Is there anyone who shouldn't get vaccinated for seasonal flu?

Children under six months old and people who are allergic to chicken eggs or have had an allergic reaction to past flu vaccines should not be vaccinated. Also, individuals who have been diagnosed with Guillaine-Barre Syndrome, a rare disease that affects the nerve cells, within six months of getting a flu vaccine should not get another.

When should I get vaccinated?

The optimal time is in October or November, before flu season starts. But flu season can peak as late as May, so the Virginia Department of Health recommends vaccination as long as vaccine is available.

How is the vaccine administered?

There are two types of vaccines. One is administered via injection, usually in the arm. The other is given as a nasal spray.

How do I know which vaccine to get?

The nasal spray vaccine should only be given to healthy people ages 5 to 49. Pregnant women, children receiving long term aspirin therapy, and those who have close contact with someone who has a weakened immune system should get the injection.

How soon after I get vaccinated will I be protected?

Adults begin to produce antibodies to the strains of flu virus in the vaccine about two weeks after receiving it.

Why do you have to get vaccinated for seasonal flu every year?

The virus itself changes from year to year, so even if you have immunity against a certain kind of virus that was in circulation last year, you may not be protected against this year's strains. Also, the immunity you built up as a result of last year's vaccine diminishes over time.